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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 003342

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: HOME MINISTER SAYS BDG PLANS TO LAUNCH NEW
PASSPORT SYSTEM IN FEBRUARY

Classified By: P/E Counselor D.C. McCullough, Reason(s): 1.4 (b),(d)

11. (C) Summary: Home Affairs Minister Babar, rebuffing an appointment with USG Passport officials, stated that Bangladesh has studied the passport systems of six or seven countries, hired an American-Bangladeshi consultant to implement a modern passport system and will float tenders later in the year for a launch in February 2006. End Summary.

12. (C) On July 10, 2005, Charge d'Affaires (CDA) paid a courtesy call on Minister of Home Affairs Babar. Resident Legal Assistant (RLA) was the notetaker for the meeting which lasted 40 minutes.

13. (C) CDA stated that the U.S. technical team to install the baseline PISCES Machine Readable Passport and Visa system could come as early as September. She stated the system had been improved such that software adaptation, which was originally discussed, was not necessary. Babar agreed that to avoid delays, the system would not have to be adapted.

14. (C) CDA offered to set up a meeting with the USG's Passport Agency for Babar during his visit to Washington D.C. beginning the week of July 25. Babar did not think this appointment was necessary because "We have done homework. We have studied six or seven countries and appointed a consultant who is an Bangladeshi-American who has consulted in India and other places. When CDA further pressed for a meeting with USG passport authorities, Babar responded: "In two weeks we will make our presentations then float the tender. We plan to launch the system in February." Babar rebuffed one more effort by the CDA to set up a meeting in the U.S. with passport authorities by saying: "The passport office is not very conversant with our system...I know everything because (I read the briefings) in my notebooks. Every week I have studied this." (NOTE: Post continues to believe that a meeting at the Passport Agency would be useful.)

15. (C) Referring to the draft Anti-Terrorism Act which the Ministry of Home Affairs had passed to Ambassador Thomas before his departure, CDA stated that government drafters appeared to have taken the draconian and unpopular Special Powers Act, which the government promised to repeal, and inserted it in the new Act. CDA stated that a terrorism act should not provide cover for a law that deprives people of their civil rights. Babar defended the inclusion by saying "we need this law" and pointed to Thailand and Malaysia which have similar laws as support for his position. He did agree, however, to CDA's suggestion that RLA could discuss this issue with the Ministry's Legal Affairs advisor to address mutual concerns.

16. (C) CDA spoke out against the extra-judicial killings of alleged criminals which appear to be on the increase. She stated that these killings have attracted the attention of the highest levels in Washington. She pointed out that Bangladesh's desire for respect in its efforts to foster human rights were being undermined by the deaths. Babar responded that the government is talking to the police and the Rapid Action Battalion, which is viewed as the main perpetrator of the extra-judicial killings, to "be more careful." He stated, "I don't want to justify it. We are pressing them not to do these things."

17. (C) He said the RAB actions were popular because the country's criminal justice system could not handle the case load. People were frustrated by the liberal bail rules applied to culprits as well as the seven or eight years it took to bring a defendant to trial if the charges had not been dismissed beforehand. He also said that Thailand had 3500 extra-judicial killings.

18. (C) He reminded CDA that A/S Rocca had agreed to provide capacity building support to law enforcement and was told by CDA that the list of requests for police assistance during D/S Burns' visit had been passed to Washington.

19. (C) Other points discussed during the meeting included:

-- The investigation on the August 21 attack on Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina continues and a few more people will be arrested. The BDG believes that 7-10 of the culprits are in Calcutta and Interpol is going to prepare a red notice to

assist in their apprehension. He criticized India for being a haven for criminals from Bangladesh.

-- Babar stated that he has suspended police officers in connection with the failure to catch Bangla Bhai. He stated he has talked to the media to call him personally if they have any information.

-- On political killings, Babar stated that 70-80% of those who die in these encounters are members of the ruling party. He revealed that the Prime Minister has a special committee that monitors these crimes. He professed that the country believed in rule of law but was only 30 years old and couldn't be expected to be as advanced as the United States which in its early history had "cowboy killings."

-- On the Kibria murder, the CDA stated the USG still wanted to interview the lead defendant in the case. Since the only way to do so, after review of the law, was through a court order, CDA requested that the Ministry assist in this request. Babar said he would have to think about the public reaction if a court order were filed. RLA was told to discuss the issue with one of his joint secretaries.

10. (C) The meeting ended with CDA's expressions of gratitude for the excellent protective services provided by the Ministry to which Babar responded that since the London bombs, security had been doubled.

11. (C) Babar provided no details of his schedule to the United States except that he hoped to meet with former mayor Giuliani in New York about law enforcement and was taking his wife and four children to Orlando to visit Disney World where other family members living in North America would join them.
CHAMMAS